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CAN WE CALL "KHACHKAR" THE SUDAK CROSS-STONES?

Reminder on the type of small mural khachkars, in the general typology of khachkars

The type of relatively large stone plates with a cross – tree of life sculpted on them, called in Armenian "khachkar" (from "khach" = cross, and "k'ar" = stone), is a well-known form of Armenian art, emblematic for this country¹. These monumental rectangular stelas stand isolated or in groups, often, but not always, in cemeteries. They are oriented like churches, so that one looks eastward when standing in front of their western, sculpted face (fig. 1).



Fig 1. Mak'ravank' Monastery (Armenia, 13th c.). Two khachkars of 1259.

¹ Petrossian H. *Khachkar. Origin, function, iconography, semantics*. Yerevan: Printinfo. 2008 (in Armenian).

This position is particularly adapted to their most widespread function – which is not however the only one –, that of a funerary stela erected to the east of a tomb, above the place where the deceased's feet are. It is conceived in such a way that on the Last Judgment day, according to beliefs, rising before the cross, the believer may be turned eastward, whence shall salvation come, and whence every morning the sun spreads its light on the world.

The scale of the khachkar phenomenon (several tens of thousands since the 9th century) and its popularity in Armenian environment are such that its typology has broadly diversified. It includes, besides the main category of khachkar as an isolated stela, several other types, such as khachkars-chapels (*խաչքարաւանդան*), khachkars embedded in a stone frame, in a wall (*որսնափակ խաչքար*), alignments of khachkars before a series of tombs, khachkars inserted in a row inside mausoleums, and sculptures with khachkar pattern carved in the rock. Finally, a "minor" type interests us here in particular, that of small mural khachkars, which has been created in Armenia at the same time as that of the tall standing khachkars, towards the end of the 9th century².

The little stone plates belonging to this last category also show the image of a cross, but they have smaller dimensions, and are intended to be inserted in the façades of churches or civil buildings. Thus, they are deprived of their own orientation. Sometimes they are deprived of inscriptions, and thus seem to convey only one message: the glorification of the cross, generally represented, as almost always in this branch of Armenian art, as a tree of life. But some examples suggest that anepigraphic khachkars may also express a prayer in memory of humble believers, simultaneously donors and deceased, who chose to remain anonymous. Such is probably the case in Tegher monastery (Armenia, 13th c.), where the western façade of the narthex is covered with both anepigraphic and inscribed small khachkars, all of them having roughly the same type and size (fig. 2). More often, inscriptions carved on the plates add a votive content – in which case, with some caution, the term *ex-voto* can be used –, or a commemorative one, which can be linked to a donation. Thus, these plates can contribute to enrich the scope and message of a religious or secular building. They may also allow the faithful to leave a record of their support to the building of a church or monastery, by placing a prayer in their memory and for the salvation of their soul, as close as possible to the sanctuary, that is on one of its façades³.

² Donabédian P. "Spécificité typologique des khachkars diasporiques: les petites plaques à croix murales" // *Armenia between Byzantium and the Orient. Celebrating the Memory of Karen Yuzbashyan (1927–2009)* // Series: Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity / Edit. by C. Horn, B. Lourié, A. Ostrovsky, and B. Outtier. Leyden: Brill (forthcoming).

³ In Armenia, burial is strictly forbidden inside a church. This prohibition has probably been extended to the type of small mural cross-plates with, at least



Fig. 2. Tegher Monastery (Armenia, 13th c.). Western facade of the narthex.

The small mural khachkars, a category proper to diaspora communities

In Armenia, the “minor” type of mural khachkars remains relatively “secondary” compared to the huge number of monumental khachkars and their very impressive “presence” in Armenia’s landscapes. On the contrary, in the communities of Armenian diaspora, this category can be considered as very characteristic, because it is almost exclusively the only one attested. Outside Armenia, examples of such kind of small, mural khachkars appear first in Cilicia and Jerusalem⁴, in the 12th c. (fig. 3). Later, this category spreads in various diaspora centers. Among them, New Julfa in Isfahan (382 plates with cross of the 17th-18thc. ⁵) and the Armenian settlements of the Crimean Peninsula (around 200 plates, from 14th to 18th c.) distinguish themselves by the number of preserved pieces.

All the examples preserved in Armenian colonies clearly demonstrate the specificity of the “diaspora type”, which is part of the

partly, a memorial / funeral content: in principle, such plates don’t appear inside the churches.

⁴ Khatchadourian H., Basmadjian M. *L’art des khatchkars. Les pierres à croix arméniennes d’Isfahan et de Jérusalem*. Paris: Geuthner. 2014.

⁵ Khatchadourian H., Basmadjian M. *L’art des...* P. 30-34, 102-103, 169-249, 334-383, and *passim*.

"minor" one already identified in Armenia, but with some peculiarities: these are again small plates, which do not stand isolated, oriented towards the east, as they are mounted in the surface of walls and thus are deprived of proper orientation. But they are no longer in tufa, but often in marble, and sometimes in other, local, stones; they are usually thin, and their decoration, which presents mainly the same kind of cross – tree of life, often surrounded with vegetal and geometric ornament, is treated in a markedly simplified way.



Fig. 3. Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate. Courtyard of St. James cathedral. Two small khachkars of 1441 and 1442.

As in Armenia, along with their main and direct meaning – the glorification of the cross, the functions of the diaspora khachkars, as expressed by the inscriptions often engraved on them, may be diverse, funerary, commemorative, votive, memorial, almost always with a prayer in memory and for the salvation of the soul of the believers mentioned in them.

The almost exclusive choice of such a modest form, in diaspora conditions, can be explained by several factors, such as: a reduction of material means, a loss of technical and artistic skills, the difficulty of erecting relatively high, isolated stelas, and perhaps the main reason – a wish of discretion, especially in Catholic or Muslim environment, where external signs of foreign cults could be undesirable, or even simply forbidden.

Sugdeïa / Soldaïa / Sudak

The important colony which the Armenians established from the end of the 13th c. onwards on the south shore of Crimea has left a rich artistic heritage which includes, as mentioned above, a relatively high number of cross plates, or cross-stones⁶. Only in Caffa / Theodosia, the Genoese administrative center of the peninsula in the 14th-15th c. , there were more than a hundred of them (fig. 4)⁷. But they are also found in other localities of the peninsula.



Fig. 4. Caffa (Crimea). Sb. Sargis / St. Sergius church. Western facade of the narthex. Photo A. Dzhanov.

In the port of Sugdeïa / Soldaïa / Sudak, where the Genoese built a large fortress and held it from 1365 to 1475, and where the sources bear the evidence of a relatively numerous Armenian presence⁸, there are series of stones adorned with one or several crosses. But these are rather

⁶ Grigoryan G. *Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum*. Liber VII: Ukraine, Moldavia. Yerevan: Gitut'yun, 1996 (in Armenian). P. 20; Aïbabina E. *The decorative stone carving of Caffa from the 14th-18th centuries*. Simferopol: Sonat. 2001 (in Russian). P. 62-98, 146-150.

⁷ Gavrilova A. "The khachkars from the funds of the Theodosia Regional Museum" // *The Second International Symposium on Armenian Art*. Vol. III. 1978. Yerevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences. 1981. P. 95-102, here P. 95.

⁸ Mik'ayelyan V. *History of the Crimean Armenians*. Yerevan: Hayastan. 1989 (in Armenian). P. 15-16, 31, 38-39 (an Armenian quarter, a church and a suburb are mentioned in medieval Sudak), P. 46 (two Armenian villages near Sudak),

different from the kind of "minor khachkars" usually sculpted in the Armenian colonies. The Sudak "cross-stones" are characterized by their "rusticity", especially the "roughness" of their crosses, the extreme modesty of their ornamentation, and the almost total absence of vegetal motifs and of epigraphy⁹. These stones are inserted here and there on the walls of the fortress towers¹⁰. The material is almost the same as that of the walls: a beige-ocher sandstone, but, according to Alexander Dzhhanov¹¹, with a genetic difference revealed by a larger number of inclusions. Despite their specificity, these sculptures have been attributed to the Armenians and called "khachkars" by the few researchers who paid attention to them¹². The purpose of this article is to attempt to take stock of this attribution, and, in fact, as the reader will very quickly understand, to confirm it.

1. Cross-stones on the Federico Astaguera tower, outside the fortress

The most numerous plates or blocks with crosses are on an isolated tower built in 1386 by the Genoese consul Federico Astaguera, out of the fortress, above the port. About ten of them are inserted on each of the four façades of this tower, mainly on its upper part (fig. 5-6). There are also several pieces inside the building. This group of stones differs from the other plates with cross of the same site, by an even higher degree of "rusticity". The sculpture is extremely simple, one could even say primitive. The crosses jut out in a flat relief, slightly protruding, on a flat bottom, inside a rectangular frame drawn by a flat strip.

P. 145-146. According to Heide and Helmut Buschhausen and Emma Korkhmazyan, a fragment of a portal frame decorated with a "Seljuk chain" comes from the Armenian church of Sudak. See: Buschhausen H. und H. Korchmasjan E. *Armenische Buchmalerei und Baukunst des Krim*. Yerevan: Nairi. 2009. Pl. F10, fig. 26. As indicates Aibabina E. *The decorative stone...* P. 159 and 245, pl. LIX/1, this sculpted fragment is inserted in the wall of a fountain, in Uytunoye village, near Sudak.

⁹ Maïko V., Dzhhanov A. *Archaeological Monuments of the Sudak Region of Crimean Republic*. Simferopol: Arial. 2015 (in Russian). P. 239.

¹⁰ The author would like to thank Rafał Quirini-Popławski and Aleksandr Dzhhanov for the up-to-date information they kindly gave him on the Sudak cross-stones. He is particularly grateful to A. Dzhhanov for having generously shared with him his documentation.

¹¹ Email of 03/05/2017.

¹² Maïko V., Dzhhanov A. *Archaeological Monuments...* *loc. cit.* For his part, Rafał Quirini-Popławski, in his recent work: *Sztuka kolonii genueńskich w basenie Morza Czarnego (1261-1475)*. Krakow: Uniwersytet Jagielloński. 2017. P. 76, regarding the decoration of the plate on Pasquale Giudice's tower (P. 75, fig. 68; see below), indicates that "it evokes Armenian khachkars".



Fig. 5. Sudak (Crimea). Federico Astaguera tower. South facade. Photo A. Dzhанov.



Fig. 6. Sudak. Federico Astaguera tower. North facade. Photo A. Dzhанov.

The crosses are of the "Latin" shape, i. e. slightly higher than wide. Most of them have slightly flared arms. They are almost deprived of ornaments (fig. 7-8). There are four types of crosses:

A) Those with faintly flared arms and concave ends, with rather sharply pointed ends.

B) Crosses with faintly flared arms, straight ends and a contour underlined by an incision. Often a thin, short shaft shows up under the lower arm, sometimes "fixed" on a large stepped stylobate.

C) Crosses with medium flared arms, approaching the "Greek cross" (with almost equal arms), and whose points are provided with a single ball. Sometimes the lower arm "leans" on a stepped podium, and an incision marks the outline of the cross.

D) Crosses with widely flared arms in the form of four triangles joined to the center, with or without stepped stylobate below the lower arm.

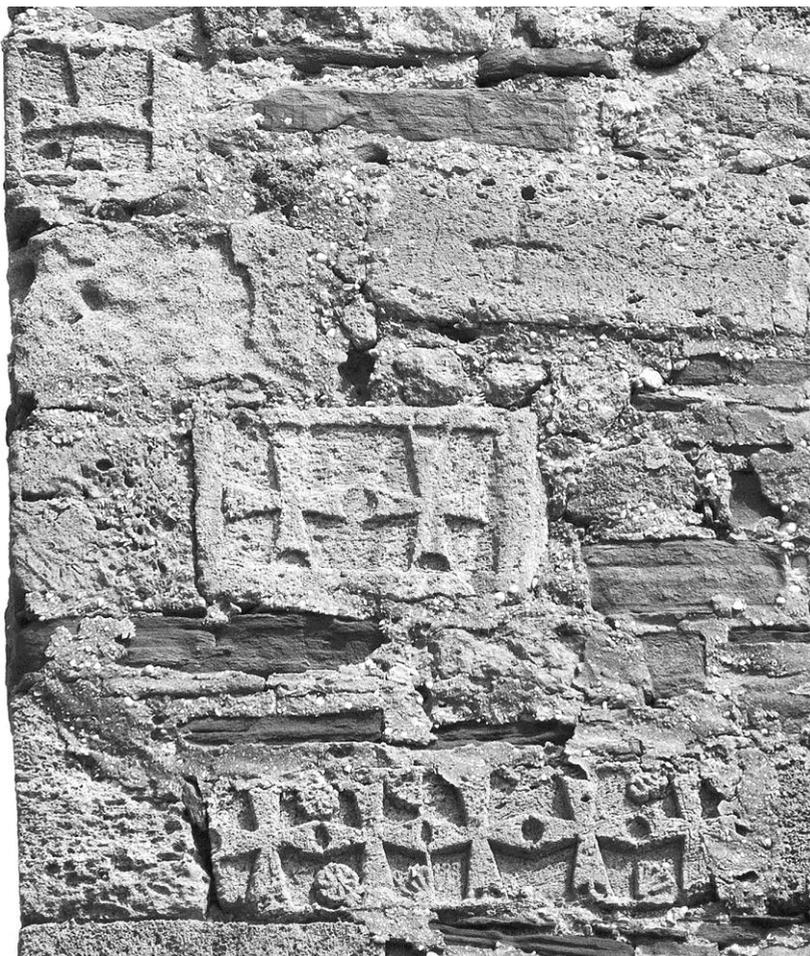


Fig. 7. Sudak. Federico Astaguera tower. South facade. Detail. Photo A. Dzhanov.



Fig. 8. Sudak. Federico Astaguera tower. North facade. Detail. Photo A. Dzhanov.

These modest, rough blocks have been reused: they are obviously not in their original location. Vadim Maïko and Aleksandr Dzhanov believe that they come from a former Armenian church¹³. They were inserted into the apparatus of the tower walls in an erratic, disorderly manner, and several seem to be reversed (top to bottom). On the same plate, inside one frame (often eroded), there is either a single cross, or two, three, four or five crosses aligned, side by side. On certain blocks with two crosses, these are shifted with respect to each other, as if the artisan had wanted to “merge” two different plates on a single block (fig. 8). There are also corner blocks which have a cross sculpted on each of the two visible faces¹⁴, which further complicates their interpretation and increases the mystery of their function. Others have been partly covered with cement. On a stone of the south façade with

¹³ Maïko V., Dzhanov A. *Archaeological Monuments...* P. 239. The authors write: “The builders could take such a quantity of blocks only from the ruins of a destroyed Armenian church. The fairly simple way of executing khachkars is characteristic of monuments of the early period of 13th-first half of the 14th century”. It should be noted that the neighbouring chapel, traditionally called “church of the Holy Apostles”, and attributed without precise grounds to the Armenians by some authors, does not present any plate of this type.

¹⁴ This means that these blocks already had a corner position at their original location; unless there are crosses on all the four faces of what could be, in such a case, the base of a tetragonal stela, a type spread in Early Christian Armenia and Georgia.

five crosses, two round medallions with a schematic daisy pattern (a rosette) and four "portions of fan" with three or four deployed rays are placed in the spaces between the crosses (fig. 7). The arrangement of these ornaments, especially of the triangular "fans", carries the deformed echo of some more elaborate plates from other towers of the same fortress, with a single framed cross (see below), of which the artist seems to have been inspired.

The whole of the plates or blocks is chronologically and technically homogeneous, because the kinship between them is obvious, and crosses of two types can be assembled on the same block. The whole is closely related to the other cross-stones present on the site, although, as we will see below, the latter ones have a slightly more careful decoration and a little more developed ornamentation. All the plates (except the last two ones – see below) share another characteristic that seems enigmatic: they are anonymous, as they bear no inscription, depriving us of clear indications on their sponsors, authors, dating and function.

2. Plates on the towers of the fortress

Several plates are inserted (reused) in the apparatus of the towers of the fortress proper.

A) One of them, very close to those previously described, is on the Battista Zoagli gates of 1389 (fig. 9). Its cross is of the type with barely flared arms, whose tips are concave, and the outline is underlined by an incision. In the upper corners are housed two "portions of fan" with four furrows. Two rosette macaroons are placed on either side of the upper arm. Framed on three sides by a flat strip, this plate has lost its lower edge, probably cut when reinserted.



Fig. 9. Sudak. Khachkar on Battista Zoagli gates.
Photo A. Dzhanov.



Fig. 10. Sudak. Khachkar on Pasquale Giudice tower. Photo A. Dzhanov.

B) The plate embedded in the Pasquale Giudice's tower of 1392 is more elaborate (fig. 10). A cross like that of the previous plate, but without peripheral incision, is flanked, in the lower quadrants, by two small crosses. The latter are "placed" on a three- or four-degree podium, whereas the main cross does not have such a base. The rectangular frame of the sculpture is adorned by a braid with two large strands. On the lateral uprights, the braid has the appearance of a chain with rounded knots, while on the upper edge it has the shape of a succession of zigzags. The bottom edge no longer appears.

Like the previous ones, these two plates are deprived of inscriptions. They raise the same questions about their authors and function. We mentioned above the opinion expressed by some scholars on the kinship of these plates with the khachkars, and even their identification with them. Indeed, all the elements present on them, although not exclusively proper to Armenian art, are very widespread on the khachkars of Armenia, as well as on their reduced avatars in the diaspora colonies, especially those of Caffa and the other localities of Crimea. Let us mention: the technique of very flat bas-relief, the design of the crosses, the evocation of Golgotha through the stepped podium under them, and through the two lateral crosses, the simplified evocation of the sun and the moon of the crucifixion figurations through the two medallions with a rosette, the angular fan-shaped ornament, and finally the chain and braid motif on the frame. The popularity of the fan-shaped ornament on the upper angles must be underlined. It is often used since the 11th c. and particularly frequent on tall khachkars of Armenia in the 14th-16th c.¹⁵ Analogous crosses with a very simple design and flat relief, with arms deprived of any ornamentation, or simply decorated by an incision along the contour, are observed on the wall khachkars of Jerusalem and Ispahan, especially in the 17th-18th c.¹⁶

But at the same time, the extreme modesty of treatment of these sculptures and the absence of inscription fully justify a certain doubt as to their attribution to the Armenian community attested in Sudak in the Middle Ages. At least such a doubt was permitted until the discovery of Armenian inscriptions on two cross-stones.

3. Two cross-stones with Armenian inscription

It is important to note that the two sculptures presented below are both substantially more sophisticated than the whole set studied above, and intrinsically linked to it.

The plate of the Barnaba Franchi di Pagano tower

An Armenian inscription was engraved on a plate fixed on the west

¹⁵ Petrossian H., *Khachkar. Origin...* P. 194, fig. 275 (1456), P. 199, fig. 284, 285, P. 200, fig. 289 (16th c.), P. 202, fig. 292 (1581), P. 348, fig. 465 (14th-15th c.).

¹⁶ Khatchadourian H., Basmadjian M., *L'art des...* several photos in the "Corpus iconographique", P. 332-414.

wall of Barnaba di Franchi di Pagano's tower (tower № 14), built in 1414. Placed on the upper edge of the stone, the inscription remained unnoticed until now, and unfortunately has almost totally disappeared during the last twenty years (fig. 11). Photographs taken at the end of last century reveal the presence of an Armenian inscription on the entire upper band of the stone, but they are not clear enough to enable a complete reading (fig. 12). They just let us guess, on the right half of the strip, the words ՀԱՅ[ՈՅ (?)] ԹՎԱԿԱՆԻ[Ն (?)] (= in the year [...] of the Armenian era). More recent photos (from the beginning of our century) show that the inscribed row is almost entirely erased (fig. 13). They allow us to read only some Armenian letters on the right end of the strip, belonging probably to the word ԹՎԱԿԱՆ.



Fig. 11. Sudak. Khachkar on Barnaba di Franchi di Pagano tower. Photo A. Emanov (1998).



Fig. 13. Sudak. Khachkar on Barnaba di Franchi di Pagano tower. Photo A. Dzhanov (2010).



Fig. 12. Sudak. Khachkar on Barnaba di Franchi di Pagano tower. Detail. Photo A. Emanov (1998).

The cross has moderately flared arms with concave ends, the tips of which bear three balls. These are the "buds" in the form of a triple

cluster common on the khachkars of Armenia since the 10th-11th c. These trefoil extremities are brightened by the hole dug in the center of each circle. The upper arm of the cross is notched with a "Maltese cross" that evokes Early Christian Armenia and Georgia, not only by its design, but also by its incisive technique peculiar to popular woodcarving. As a complement to this "Maltese cross", two medallions are carved on either side of the upper arm, each of them occupied by a six-petal rosette. The slanting incisions which highlight these rosettes are also characteristic of woodcarving and refer again to the repertoire of the Early Christian period. With the central "Maltese cross", these two medallions form a three-medallion composition, presenting a cross flanked by two rosettes, common on the lintels, imposts and bases of Early Christian Armenia, and still popular in the 15th c. on khachkars of Armenia¹⁷ and, in a slightly different interpretation, of Jerusalem¹⁸. At the same time, the two lateral medallions refer, as on the previous plates, to the sun and the moon on both sides of the crucifixions.

The arms of the cross present an unusual feature: arcs protrude half way up their sides, a kind of "handles" which we shall find on the second piece examined below. It is probably a reinterpretation of the medallions containing the *nomina sacra* of the names Lord, God, Jesus, Christ, which are often "applied" on the arms of the crosses on Jerusalem khachkars of the 15th-16th c.¹⁹ In Jerusalem, these four medallions are larger than the arms, so they protrude on their sides (fig. 3). Here, only the prominences remain, underlined by the incision in the bowl which hollows their junction with the edges of the arms.

The cross is preceded here by a broad shaft which "rests" on a stepped pedestal. It is flanked in the lower quadrants by two smaller crosses, with more sober treatment, also preceded by a strong pole on a podium. The lower band of the frame has been destroyed, but the initial height of the three "stylobates" can easily be discerned: four degrees under the central cross, and two degrees below the lateral crosses. The two lateral uprights of the frame are empty of any decoration; as for the upper band, it bore the inscription, now mainly erased. The four-spoke fan ornament, already mentioned elsewhere, here also fills the two upper corners, giving the whole a beautiful balance that makes this plate the most emblematic of the Sudak khachkars.

¹⁷ Petrossian H. *Khachkar. Origin...* P. 194, fig. 275 (1456), P. 197, fig. 280 (1420), P. 198, fig. 282 (15th c.).

¹⁸ Khatchadourian H., Basmadjian M. *L'art des...* P. 382, JER-HCB006 (1440), P. 384, JER-HCB026.

¹⁹ Khatchadourian H., Basmadjian M. *L'art des...* P. 382, JER-HCB002 (1442), JER-HCB010 (1441) [the *nomina sacra* correspond to the words God, Holy, Mother of God], P. 394, JER-HTP004 (1523), P. 414, JER-THE040 (1590). On the Jerusalem plate n° JER-HCB036 of 1755 (p. 386), the medallions, marked with *nomina sacra*, have been modified in such a way that they form a large rounded clover at the end of each arm.

The stela previously on tower n° 16

The second inscription is carved on a fragment of stela (fig. 14), which comes from tower n° 16, but is now kept in the Sudak fortress museum²⁰. This inscription is preserved on only about half of the field it originally occupied, and which covered practically the entire lower part of the stela, approximately its lower third. Today only the top three lines of the inscription are visible. The text is in carefully drawn large capitals. In each interval between the rows of letters runs a thin horizontal strip. As on the crosses of the upper register, the rows of characters and the intermediate strips are slightly prominent and not engraved in the stone, which betrays the attention paid to this text. We can suppose the initial existence of six or seven horizontal rows reserved for the inscription, the three or four lower rows having eroded, probably due to the friability of the sandstone. The relative length of this text, the care given to its sculpture, and the place reserved for it show the importance attached to this stela, which, as we shall see later, also distinguish other peculiarities. The text has been published,²¹ but a slightly amended version can be proposed here (the ligatures are shown by underlining them):

1. ԿԱՆԿՆԵՑԱԻ ՄԲ [ՄԲ = ՍՈՒՐԲ]
2. ԽԱՉԱ Ի ՅԻՇԱՍԱ-
3. Կ ԴԹԻ [ԴԹԻ = ԴԱԻԹԻ?] ՆՈՐՇԱՀԻՆ²²
4. ... [...]

with the following attempt of translation: «This holy cross was erected in memory of Dawit' (?), of [or for] Noršah»²³ [...].

The preserved fragment is broken in such a way that the main cross is interrupted at half of its height or slightly lower. We can therefore imagine that the original height of the stela was greater than the present fragment by around a third. In other words, the proportions of the present stela were much slenderer than those of all the previous plates.

²⁰ Maïko V., Dzhanov A. *Archaeological Monuments...* P. 321, 396, fig. 197/6.

²¹ Grigoryan 1996, P. 145, n° 384.

²² We propose minor corrections concerning: A) the preposition "Ի" in "Ի ՅԻՇԱՍԱԿ", which is attached by a ligature to the last letter "Ս" of the preceding word "ԽԱՉԱ" (in our copy, the ligature "-ՍԻ" is underlined, but "Ի" is shown separated from "ԽԱՉԱ") [Grigoryan had not seen it]; B) the hyphenation "ՅԻՇԱՍԱ / Կ"; C) the letter "Հ" in the forename "ՆՈՐՇԱՀ" [Grigoryan read "Յ" instead of "Հ"]. The reading of the third line, especially for the name "Dawit'", is uncertain.

²³ Norshah is an Armeno-Persian forename attested in the 14th-17th centuries. See Ačařyan H. *Dictionary of Armenian Names*. T. 4. Yerevan: State University. 1948 (in Armenian). P. 86, *sv.* "Noršah".



Fig. 14. Sudak. Khachkar previously on tower n° 16, now in the Fortress Museum. Photo A. Dzhanov.

The main cross and the two secondary ones on its sides belong to one of the types attested here: they have moderately flared arms, concave extremities, and rather sharp points. As shown by the lower arm of the central cross, the points are marked with the same clover or three-ball cluster as on the previous plate. One element attracts attention: the magnitude (height and width) of the four-stage podium that "carries" the central cross. Under the cross, the usual shaft is covered by a medallion containing a rosette / daisy with six almond-like petals or a six-branch star. Another element retains attention on the flanks of the lower arm of the central cross: two arched "handles", like the ones noted on the previous plate. What is still discernible on the top left of the fragment testifies that such "handles" also protruded on the other arms of the cross. The two small lateral crosses, properly placed in the lower quadrants, have the same shape as the central one, but without trefoil bunches at their points, without arches on their sides, and only with a small stem, partly eroded, under their lower arm.

The rather broad flat strip which bordered the plates examined above is replaced here by a much thinner margin. This feature adds to all the previous traits - slender proportions, height of the lower register and quality of the letters design, height of the podium under the cross. . . - to underline the special care given to this work, without concealing however its relation to all the other Sudak cross-plates. Thus, one can note the specificity of the last two works, which, while forming part of the group of cross-stones of this site, are distinguished by their quality, obviously linked with the presence of an inscription²⁴. Moreover, the last stela seems more like an isolated khachkar, even of small size, than like a mural plate.

4. Fragment of a stela with cross (a "rustic" isolated khachkar?) in Sudak

Before concluding this study, let us note the fragment of a stela with a cross, of beige limestone, preserved at Sudak (fig. 15). Initially high and narrow, this stone is reused, laid on its side, in the apparatus of a ruined Genoese church. It is inserted in the north wall of the remains of a bell tower, north of the chevet of the so-called Virgin Mary church. It is described by Vadim Maïko and Alexandr Dzhanov as "a tombstone. . . with a rough representation of a flowered cross"²⁵.

In a frame formed by a flat strip and rounded at its top, on an empty, flat bottom, a cross is roughly sculpted, scarcely higher than large, with arms in broad triangles, deprived of any ornament (fig. 16). It is "fixed", by means of a thin shaft, on a "trunk" of uncertain design, from which "grow" two "atrophied" branches. A large space, above the cross, is left empty. The bottom of the stela is broken.

²⁴ In an e-mail of 11.01.2018 A. Dzhanov was kind enough to report the discovery, in 2016, of a third Armenian inscription, illegible, on a fragment of khachkar.

²⁵ Maïko V., Dzhanov A. *Archaeological Monuments...* P. 331, 407, fig. 208/6.

Despite its almost primitive simplicity, the morphology (its rounded top) and proportions of the present stela, and its decoration with a vegetable cross suggest that it could be a very modest khachkar, initially erected. The dating is very difficult, but the rudeness of the treatment might suggest a late period, its "rustic" carving being not very far from that of the plates on the Federico Astaguera tower.



Fig. 15. Sudak. Ruins of "Virgin Mary" church. Fragment of stela. Photo A. Dzhanov.

The presence of such an (initially) standing khachkar should not surprise us. Indeed, a few examples, entirely or partly preserved, notably in St. Sergius church of Caffa (two 18th c. khachkars – one of them dated 1761 –, anciently standing, now inserted into the western façade of the narthex (fig. 4))²⁶, and in the Theodosia Museum,²⁷ as well as Minas Bzhshkiants' evidence²⁸, confirm that, besides the numerous wall plates with crosses, the Armenian community of Caffa possessed monumental khachkars, standing as isolated stelae²⁹. It should also be remembered that the stela with inscription mentioned just above may also have been a khachkar initially erected.

²⁶ These two pieces were obviously made on the model of the elongated stelae of the end of the 16th – the very beginning of the 17th c., in the cemetery of Julfa (Nakhichevan).

²⁷ Aïbabina E. *The decorative stone...* P. 87-88, fig. 22. P. 90, 93, 214, pl. XXVIII, № 2. P. 98. P. 215, pl. XXIX.

²⁸ Bzhshkiants M. *Travel to Poland*. (in armenian) Venice: Saint Lazarus. 1830]. P. 334. The author describes in Caffa, near the rampart, "a few large pedestals on which were fixed human-sized khachkars and *inscribed stelae* [?], which were transferred to Petersburg".

²⁹ The Caffa community is, to our knowledge, the only one, in the whole Armenian diaspora, which has preserved, at least through some examples, no longer visible in their original situation, the national tradition of monumental khachkars standing alone.



Fig. 16. Sudak. Ruins of "Virgin Mary" church. Detail with a fragment of stela. Photo A. Dzhanov.

Moreover, the still visible pieces and fragments of the Caffa tall khachkars date back to the modern period: such stelae were still created in Crimea in the 18th c. Their clumsy echo could be born from the hands of a very modest craftsman living in what remained of Soldaïa.

Yes, we can certainly call them "khachkar"

Despite the extreme simplicity of the many cross-stones preserved in Sudak and their atypical character, some archaeologists and art historians apply them the name "khachkar" and consider them as Armenian. Given the arguments already invoked: a) the relationship between these cross-stones and the khachkars of Armenia and of diaspora colonies, b) the presence of the above-mentioned inscriptions, c) the evidence of an Armenian population in Sugdeïa / Soldaïa / Sudak during the Middle Ages and the Modern period, this attribution can be considered quite justified.

The anonymity of the overwhelming majority of Sudak khachkars remains enigmatic. But the modesty of their treatment can be explained by the role of model attributed to the best examples, probably produced for the most respected citizens, and provided with nominative inscriptions (fig. 12-15). For more humble members of the community, anonymous plates might well be sufficient to bear the memory and, more important, the prayer of the believers, as did, for example, the anepigraphic plates of Tegher monastery in Armenia (fig. 2), or the numerous simple crosses engraved without any identifying sign, on the façades of many Armenian monasteries³⁰, as well as on the inner walls of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem³¹.

As for their dating, the Sudak khachkars could reasonably be located during the period most favorable to their creation, that of the Genoese presence on the south shore of Crimea, from the end of the 13th c. to the conquest of the peninsula by the Ottomans in 1475. This could have started before the Soldaïa fortress was built, at the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th c., because it is obvious that the cross-stones have nothing to do with the construction of the fortress). We have pointed out a series of parallels targeting the 14th-15th centuries (especially the 15th). But we know that, despite the ordeal of the Ottoman conquest, life did not stop for the Crimean Armenians at the end of the 15th century: the abundant production, in Caffa, of mural khachkars, and the erection of some larger isolated khachkars, dating from the 16th-18th centuries, as well as the copy of numerous manuscripts, often illuminated, particularly in the 17th c.³², clearly shows this. For the very "primitive" khachkars, especially, a late dating, from the end of the Middle Ages and the Modern period, cannot be ruled out. It is known, however, that in the 19th century there were no more Armenians on the site of Sudak: Minas Bzhshkiantz attests it.³³

³⁰ Petrossian H. *Khachkar. Origin...* P. 70, fig. 65.

³¹ Khatchadourian H., Basmadjian M. *L'art des...* P. 404, JER-SEP005. Here the numerous anonymous crosses are just accompanied with a date (1721), in Armenian.

³² Buschhausen H., H., Korchmasjan E. *Armenische Buchmalerei...* P. 21, 34-35, and *passim*.

³³ Bzhshkiantz M. *Travel to...* P. 318.

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